

***Sisyrinchium septentrionale* E.P. Bicknell**

blue-eyed grass
Iridaceae (Iris Family)

Status: State Sensitive

Rank: G3G4S2S3

General Description: From Henderson (1976): Caespitose perennial herb, glaucous green. Roots numerous, spreading, light to dark brown. Leaves slender, erect or ascending, generally shorter and narrower than the stem, about 1/16 inch wide, gradually tapering to a very sharp apex, the margins entire. Stems simple, 2-winged, 1/16 inch wide, up to 12 inches tall, the margins entire. Spathe terminal on the stem, the bracts very unequal in length. Inner bract 2/3 to 1 inch long, the inner margins broadly hyaline below, tapering abruptly to a thin line below the tip, the outer margin entire, convex, the slender tip curving to meet the outer bract. Outer bract 3/4 to 2 1/4 inch long, tapering to a slender acute tip, the outer margin entire, the inner margins narrow-hyaline, connate at the base for 1/16 inch. Flowers 2-5 on slender, spreading, glabrous pedicels generally shorter than the inner bract. Perianth blue-violet to white, with a yellow eye, the segments narrowly elliptic to oblanceolate, apiculate to aristulate but not emarginate, 1/3 to 1/2 inch long. Outer tepals with a length/width ratio of 3 to 3 1/2. Filament column 1/8 inch long, yellow-glandular proximally <1/16 inch. Anthers yellow, 1/16 inch long. Ovary at anthesis 1/16 inch long, moderately glandular-stipitate, often with tangled hairs. Capsules obovoid to spherical, 1/8 to 1/4 inch long. Seeds <1/16 inch in diameter, black, angled, finely pitted, 12-30 per capsule.

Identification Tips: The taxon can be distinguished from other species by the very slender, prolonged outer bract, the narrow stems and leaves, and the emarginate perianth segments (Henderson 1976).

Phenology: Identifiable May to mid-July.

Range: Known from northeastern Washington, adjacent northern Idaho, north to British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. In Washington the species occurs in Okanogan, Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens counties in the Okanogan Highlands physiographic province.

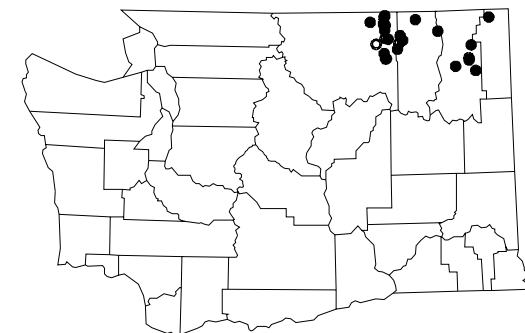
Sisyrinchium septentrionale

blue-eyed grass



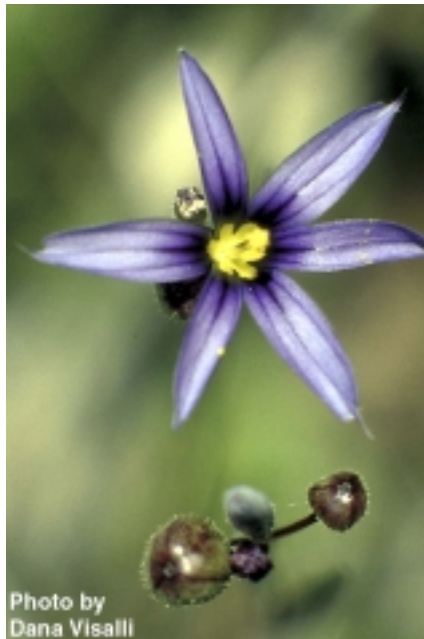
From Henderson, Douglass M. 1976. A biosystematic study of Pacific Northwestern blue-eyed grasses (*Sisyrinchium*, Iridaceae). *Brittonia* Vol. 28, No. 2. Used with permission.

Known distribution of
Sisyrinchium septentrionale
in Washington



- Current (1980+)
- Historic (older than 1980)

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Habitat: Occurs primarily in open wet meadows, sometimes in association with perennial streams and sometimes within a mosaic that includes forested wetlands (with *Picea engelmannii*). Grasses and sedges commonly dominate the habitats. Graminoid species present include *Carex flava*, *Carex capillaris*, *Carex interior*, *Carex aurea*, *Phleum* spp., *Muhlenbergia glomerata* and *Juncus* sp. Shrubs present include *Cornus stolonifera*, *Spiraea betulifolia* and *Potentilla fruticosa*. *Betula glandulosa* is also present at several sites. Elevation ranges from 2100 to 6100 feet.

Ecology: *Sisyrinchium septentrionale* is identified as a facultative wetland species (USFWS 1988). The species has been observed growing in old pastures which indicates some tolerance to disturbance. Grazing may help to maintain the open habitat needed by the species, but there may also be threats associated with grazing. The occurrence of this taxon in only non-glaciated areas of Washington and Canada suggests it is a relict species.

State Status Comments: The species is peripheral in Washington and is rare throughout its range.

Inventory Needs: Additional inventory is needed to accurately establish the range and abundance of the species in Washington.

Threats and Management Concerns: The greatest threat to the species at most sites is excessive grazing and trampling. In addition, competition with non-native species and land conversion are potential threats.

References:

Henderson, D.M. 1976. A biosystematic study of pacific north-western blue-eyed grasses (*Sisyrinchium*, Iridaceae). *Brittonia* 28: 149-176.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1988. National list of vascular plant species that occur in wetlands. USFWS Biological Report 88 (24).